

Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2010/08/23 : CIA-RDP85T00287R000101590001-7  
[redacted]  
Assessment Center

Attached is OPA/AF's response to the  
DCI's recent request for background information  
on the situation in Ethiopia's Tigre province.  
The paper was written by [redacted] and was  
coordinated with OGCR, DDO, and the NIO/AF.

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[redacted]  
Acting Director, Political  
Analysis

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Attachment:  
As stated.

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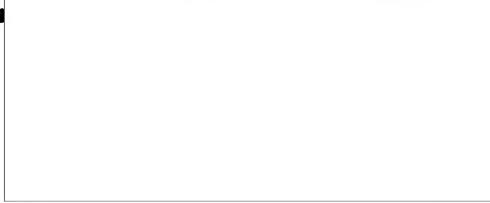
**NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER**

**WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505**

**16 JUL 1980**

**NOTE FOR THE DIRECTOR**

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**Attachment:**  
**As stated.**

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**MEMORANDUM****THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA'S TIGRE PROVINCE**

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**SUMMARY**

The Tigreans--who have cultural and religious ties with Ethiopia's dominant Amhara ethnic group--inhabit Tigre Province in northern Ethiopia. For centuries the Amhara and Tigre royal houses vied with one another for control of the country and for recognition as the legitimate defender of Ethiopian culture and religious orthodoxy.

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The collapse of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime led to the weakening of central government control, sparking a renewal of Tigrean separatism, which had last arisen in the 1940s. In March 1975, the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), a Marxist and predominantly Christian organization, was formed; its goals--never clear--have at one time or another included independence, federation with an independent Eritrea, or autonomy. Over the next year or so it gradually absorbed smaller Tigrean resistance groups. Although TPLF forces do not seriously threaten government control of the province, they hamper logistic efforts by the government in support of its counterinsurgency in neighboring Eritrea.

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This memorandum was written by [redacted] the Africa Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was requested by the Director of Central Intelligence and has been coordinated with the Directorate for Operations, the National Intelligence Officer for Africa, and the Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research. Research was completed on 15 July 1980. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Africa Division, OPA, [redacted]

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### Ideology and Support

The leadership of the approximately 6,000-man TPLF is strongly Marxist, but this ideological compatibility with the central government has not resulted in any negotiations between the two sides. The TPLF's membership, on the other hand, is diverse and includes a significant number of conservative peasants opposed to the socialist policies of the Ethiopian Government. Leaders of the TPLF, aware of this, have generally minimized ideology and instead have stressed the historical Tigrean resentment of the Amhara.

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Until 1979, the TPLF made little effort to secure foreign assistance. Since then, delegations have traveled to Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and other conservative Arab countries seeking economic and military aid. Their success with Muslim governments has been limited by the almost exclusive Christian makeup of the TPLF. As a result, the TPLF suffers from a shortage of military equipment, relying on arms that have been captured from the Ethiopians, furnished by the Marxist Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, or provided by Sudan from Eritrean assets.

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### Prospects

The Tigrean insurgency has grown rapidly in the past two years. Prior to mid-1978, the TPLF probably numbered no more than 2,000 to 3,000 lightly armed guerrillas who operated in the rugged terrain of sparsely populated western and northwestern Tigre Province. When not fighting the Ethiopians, the TPLF spent much of its time battling two rival antigovernment organizations, the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union and the leftist Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party. By late 1978, the TPLF had defeated both groups and became the dominant rebel group in Tigre Province. The TPLF could easily double its troop strength if the weapons and ammunition were available.

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Despite its successes and dedication, the TPLF does not pose a serious threat to the government's control of the province. It is primarily a rural-based organization with little apparent support among Tigreans in the more important urban centers, where the government is in firm control. There are approximately 24,000 government troops in the province.

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The Tigrean insurgency has had an impact on the government's effort in neighboring Eritrea Province, however, where government troops are bogged down. During the past year, TPLF forces have taken control of sizable portions of northwestern and western Tigre, where there are few government troops, and initiated activity in the central portion of the

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province. They have launched small-scale attacks on government convoys and smaller garrisons along the road to Asmara, threatening the government's main overland supply route to Eritrea. To counter this activity, the government has been forced to divert additional forces to static defense and convoy escort duty in Tigre. Should the Tigrean rebellion spread--as seems likely--the central government probably will find it necessary to commit more forces to the province, further diluting its ability to quell insurgencies elsewhere in the country.

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**Attachment:**  
**Map of Ethiopia**

SUBJECT: THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA'S TIGRE PROVINCE

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